

"Technology is exciting, but it's not as important as your personal human interaction with your customers."

It Takes More



Than Technology



By Bob Stoffels

that knowledge as we deal with the customer.

Pete Reshaw, general manager of Southern Ontario Field Services, says it a bit differently: "We want to come to work every day eager to be our customers' first choice in communications products and services; to provide better products, services, thinking, processes. We want to be faster, and more agile – with less bureaucracy – and first with new ideas, new services, and new solutions."

Whew! No lack of energy there! Not only are these objectives worthwhile, they're also more than a bit challenging. The bigger question is this: exactly HOW can providers accomplish such lofty goals?

Lately, dozens of telcos have asked the same question – and answered it in one particular way. They knew they needed to train their outside plant (OSP) personnel. They also wanted focused training so the time spent out of the field would contribute to the productivity there. They wanted a training symposium that dealt with technology, tools

Bell Canada's Strategy to Decrease Truck Rolls and Trouble Tickets Takes

Technology is exciting, but it's not as important as your personal, human interaction with your customers," explains Jean Taillon, senior vice president of operations for Bell Ontario, an arm of Bell Canada.

What does this mean? Does it mean that technology is really not all that important? That all we have to do is be nice to customers?

"Not at all," Taillon continues. "These are difficult times for the

telecommunications sector. We must cut expenses in our mainstream products and services so that we can invest more in new ventures. We all have to do more with less funding. We have to work smarter, cut waste, and rework. . . ."

Work smarter. And just how is that done? By making sure we understand the company's objectives, by understanding the products we offer, and the tools that make those products work. And then, we use

being used in the field, and techniques that impact the customer – today. Perhaps the key phrase here is “tools being used.”

Now there’s nothing wrong with seeing and understanding tools that might be used next year or the year after; that’s the stuff on which the future is built. But will this knowledge help OSP teams with their job tomorrow? That, after all, is the crucial question.

So the particular training symposiums companies such as Bell Canada, BellSouth, and others offer just that – they call on (indeed, insist on) those suppliers who are currently providing tools and equipment to their company. The supplier is then asked to be present to demonstrate their products. Not only that, the attendees at the symposium are required to use the equipment, with

- “I’ve learned things I wish I had learned years ago.” (Corporate Health and Safety representative)
- “By having the suppliers here, and so many of them, you can go right there and get a hands-on lesson.” (Cable Repair Technician)
- “People are meeting people who have just been phone voices to them up to now.” (Regional Process Manager)

So who puts it together? Who decides on content? Who handles the logistics?

The answer is “lots of people.”

The company sponsoring the event (in this case a division of Bell Canada) does much of the “putting it together.” And it is that company that decides on the content, because only they know what tools/equipment/techniques are used within their company.

Work smarter. And just how is that done?

the expert in attendance. When their superiors see that, then they will know that it’s highly likely the equipment will be used in the field when they leave the symposium.

But there must be more to it if managers such as Taillon want improvement in their teams’ interactions with customers. The training symposiums must demonstrate more than hardware and software. They must show methods of improving their teams’ soft skills such as customer care, problem resolution, quality improvement, and the like.

So, in this symposium there is a combination of keynote speeches (always), seminars, and actual hands-on-training stations addressing those softer issues. And participation is not optional; each attendee is required to attend a specific number of each, with special emphasis oriented toward the products and technologies important to each particular department and group.

Does it work?

Here are a few comments from the recent London, Ontario, training symposium for Bell Canada:

The logistics are handled by the inventors of the program, a consulting firm, KWP (Kasten, Wagner, Pennington & Associates). Alex Kasten, a principal of the company, shares why he and his partners began such a program. “I was with Bell Atlantic for many years, and worked on various trade shows for them. But there were things missing, and although learning certainly happened, all too often it was by accident. So, we (my partners, Bill Pennington and John Wagner) saw the need for something a bit more structured.”

Structured?

“Yes. We thought it would be appropriate to have instruction and demonstration on products currently being used by the particular telco — not of products that some supplier *hoped* would be used by the telco. And it grew from there.” To date, KWP has put on the symposium almost 50 times, and although each is different in some respect, the same general format is followed.

Usually the entire field force of the sponsoring company attends, for a single day. Frequently, these people

are bused in, starting at dawn, and brought home later that day. The following day, a second group from the company attends (and the program is the same). In many cases, a third group attends on a third day. In that way no one is left out; each attendee has the opportunity – and obligation – to get up to speed on the things that are important to the service provider.

At the London, Ontario, symposium for Bell Canada, more than 900 people attended over three days. Twenty-six seminars were offered. Attendees included technicians, managers, engineers, associates, executives, and support staff. Departments represented were Cable Repair, Business Installation and Repair, Expertech Outside Plant, Data Services, Gateways, the new London Buried Wire Centre, and Network Provisioning. There were more than 60 suppliers and vendors on hand, demonstrating meters, test sets, tools, supplies, and other equipment.

Subjects covered in the seminars included Voice over IP, Multimedia, High Speed Data Transmission, Testing Concepts for Line Qualification, VDSL Architecture, Trunking and Dynamic Routing, along with Broadband Network Overview. The challenge, of course, was to include those subjects that were, or very soon would be, most meaningful to the attendees.

They came; they saw; they returned to the field. They learned and used things that were part of their job and could impact their effectiveness on the job as soon as they returned to it. That’s HOW Bell Canada is using more than just technology to impact their customers and the bottom line. ■

Bob Stoffels is a telecommunications consultant with more than 45 years of experience in engineering and editing. He can be reached at 727.867.5378 or by email: stoffels@juno.com.

For more information about KWP, call 888.276.1449 or visit: www.kwponline.com.